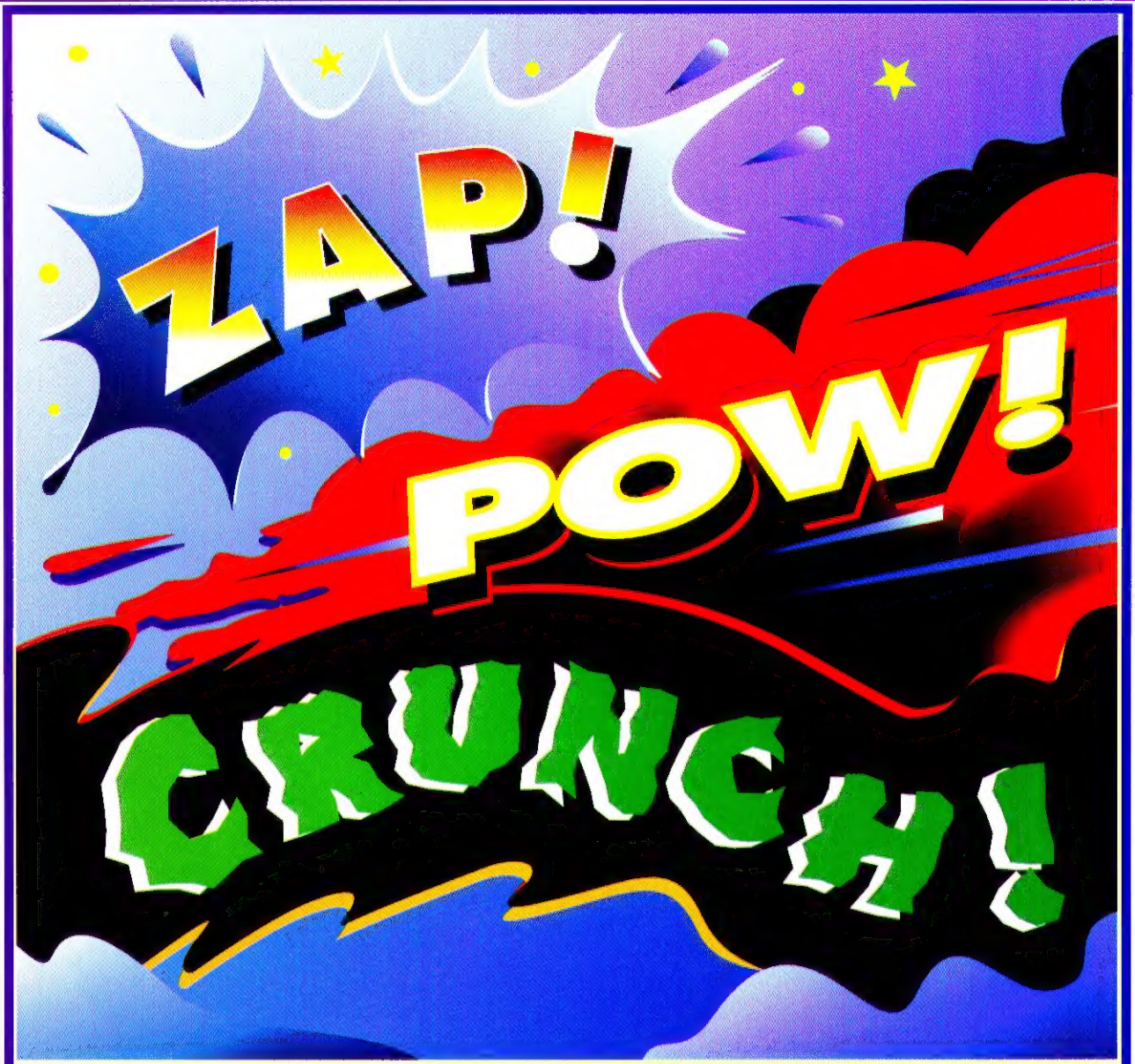
HOW TO DRAW COMIC BOOK HEROES AND VILLAINS

Part 2 "Zap! Pow! Crunch!"

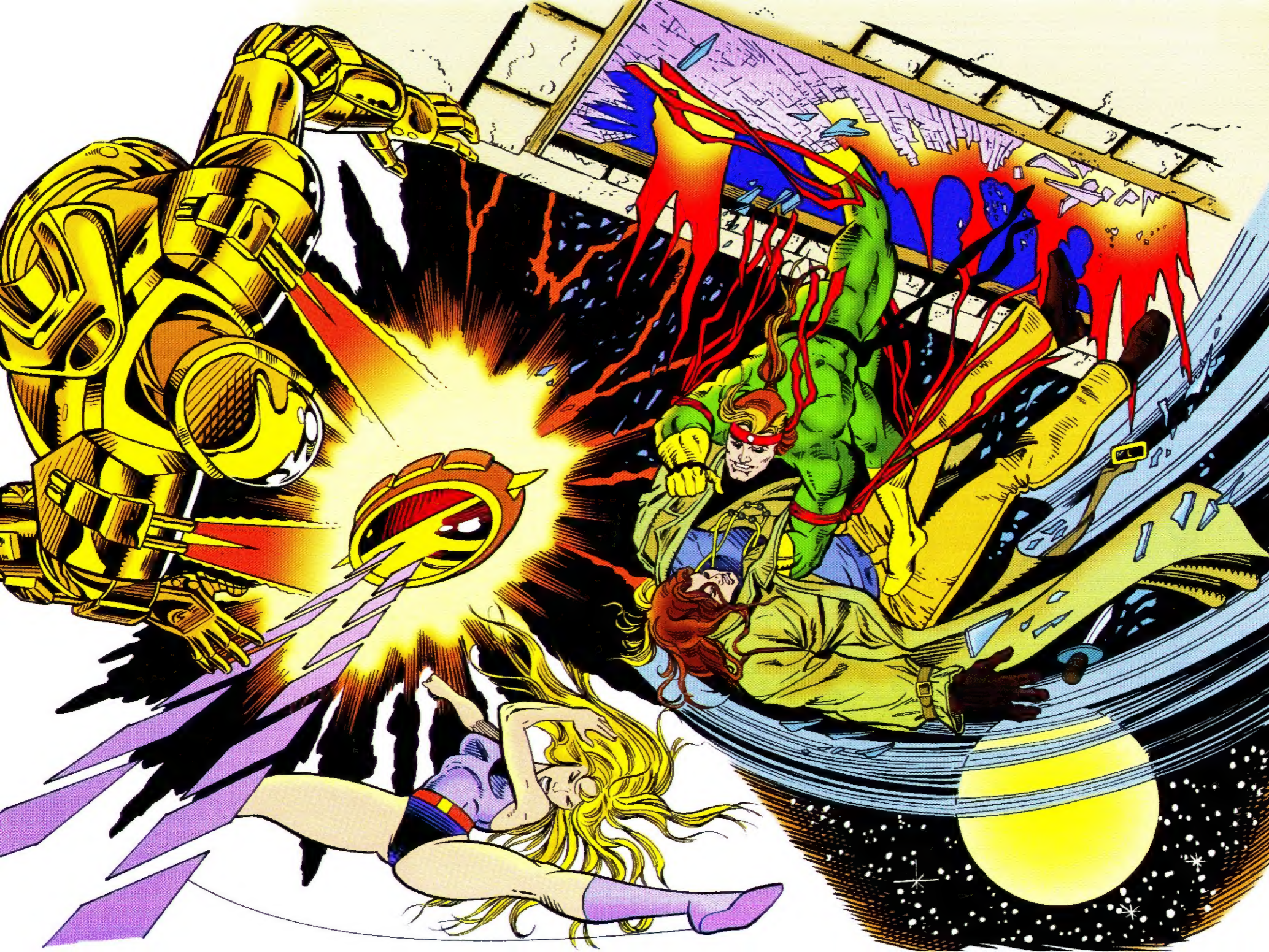
From the author of the best-selling
HOW TO DRAW CARTOONS FOR COMIC STRIPS

CHRISTOPHER HART

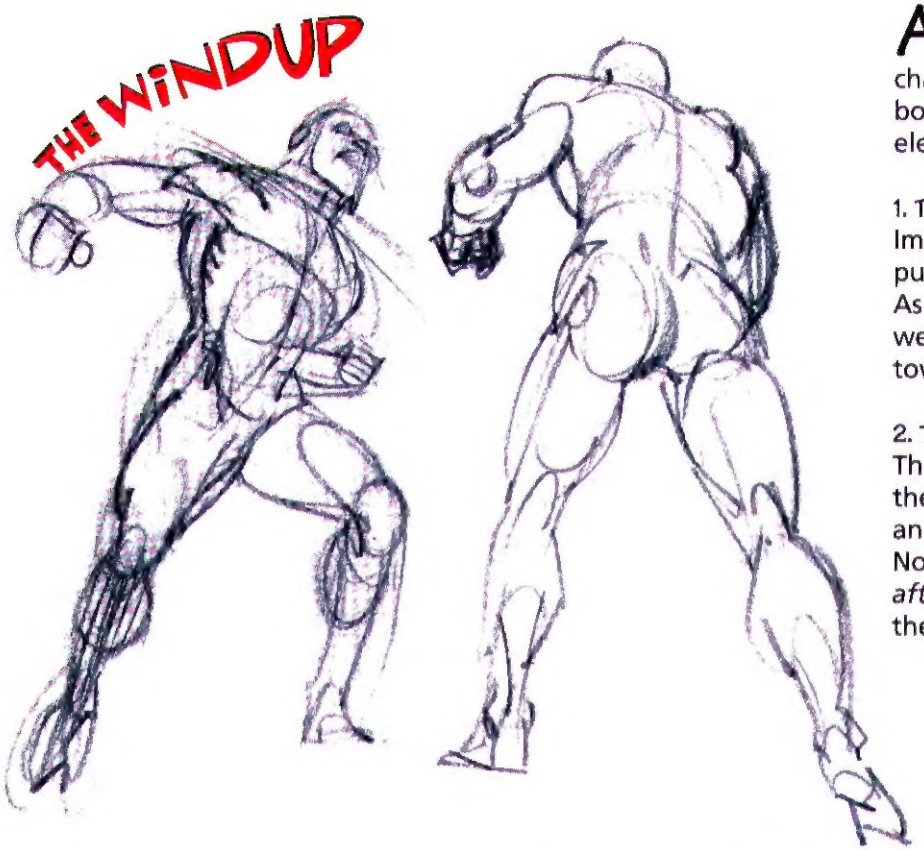


LET'S TAKE THE GLOVES OFF!

Comic book fans will wade through any story if there's the promise of a really good fight scene at the end. These characters are built for one thing only—and I don't mean dancing! The key to drawing a great fight scene is understanding how the human figure adapts to motion and momentum. So take off your gloves and let's at 'em!



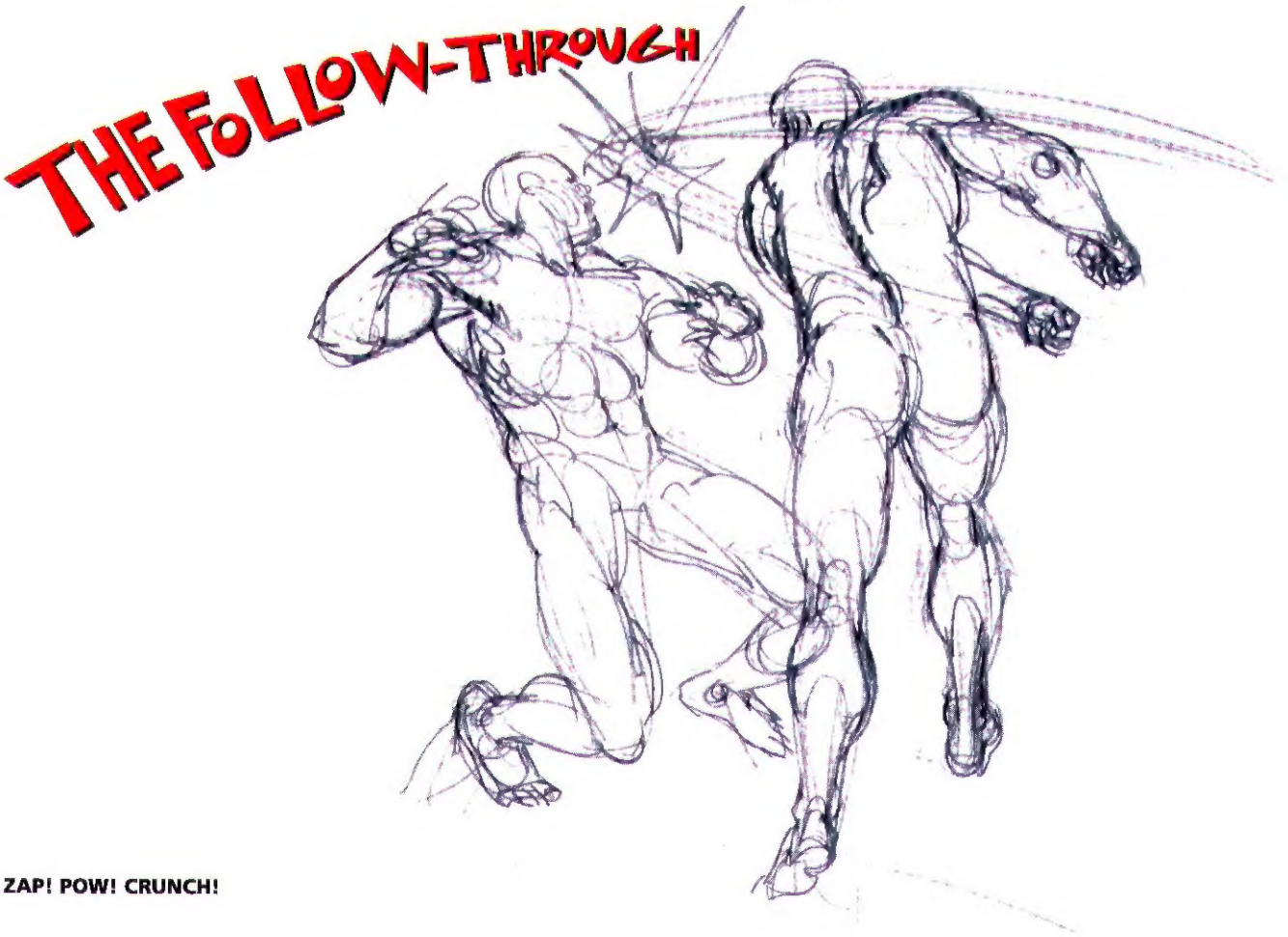
DEVASTATING PUNCHES

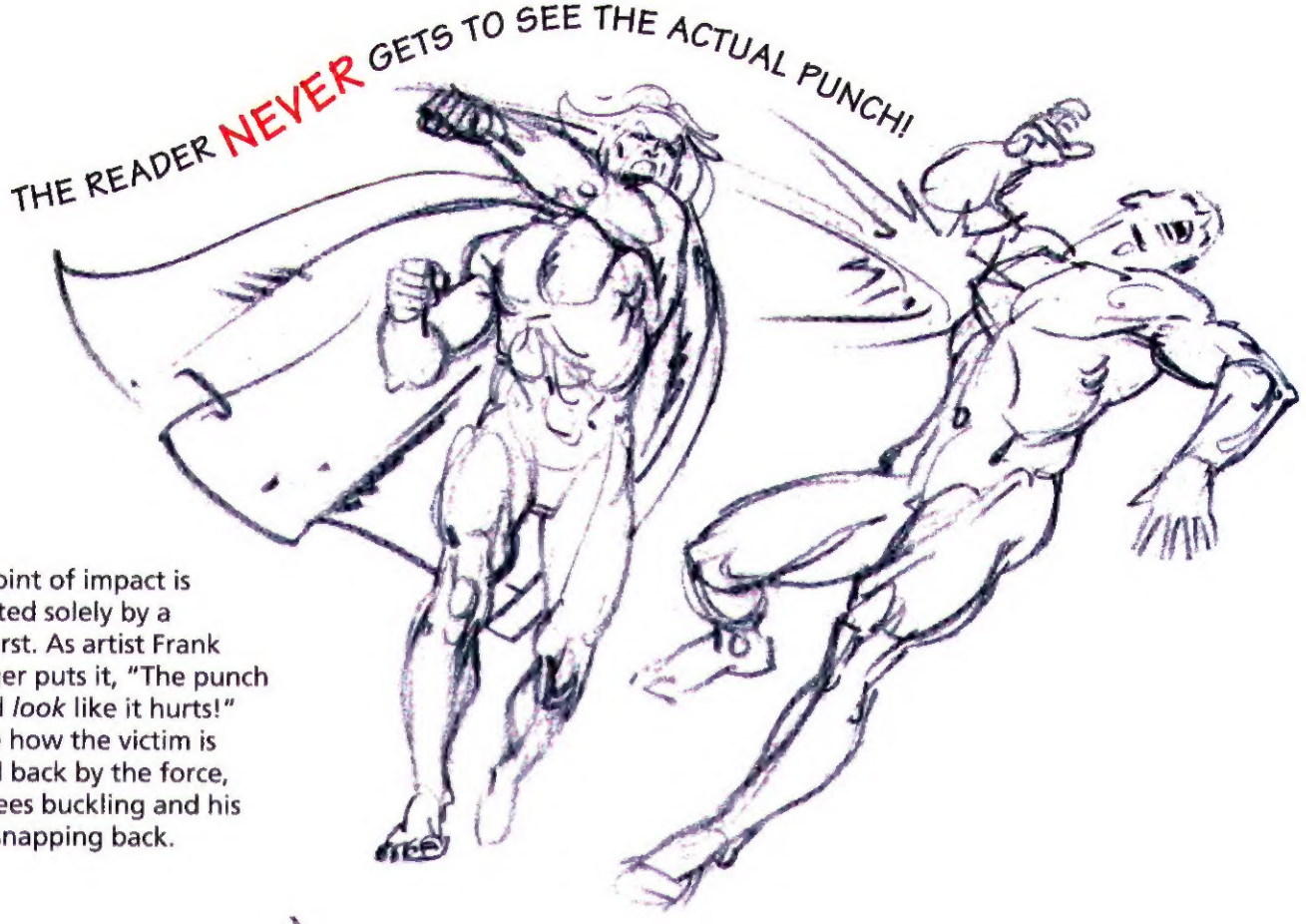


A devastating punch is an important part of any character's repertoire. A comic book punch consists of two elements:

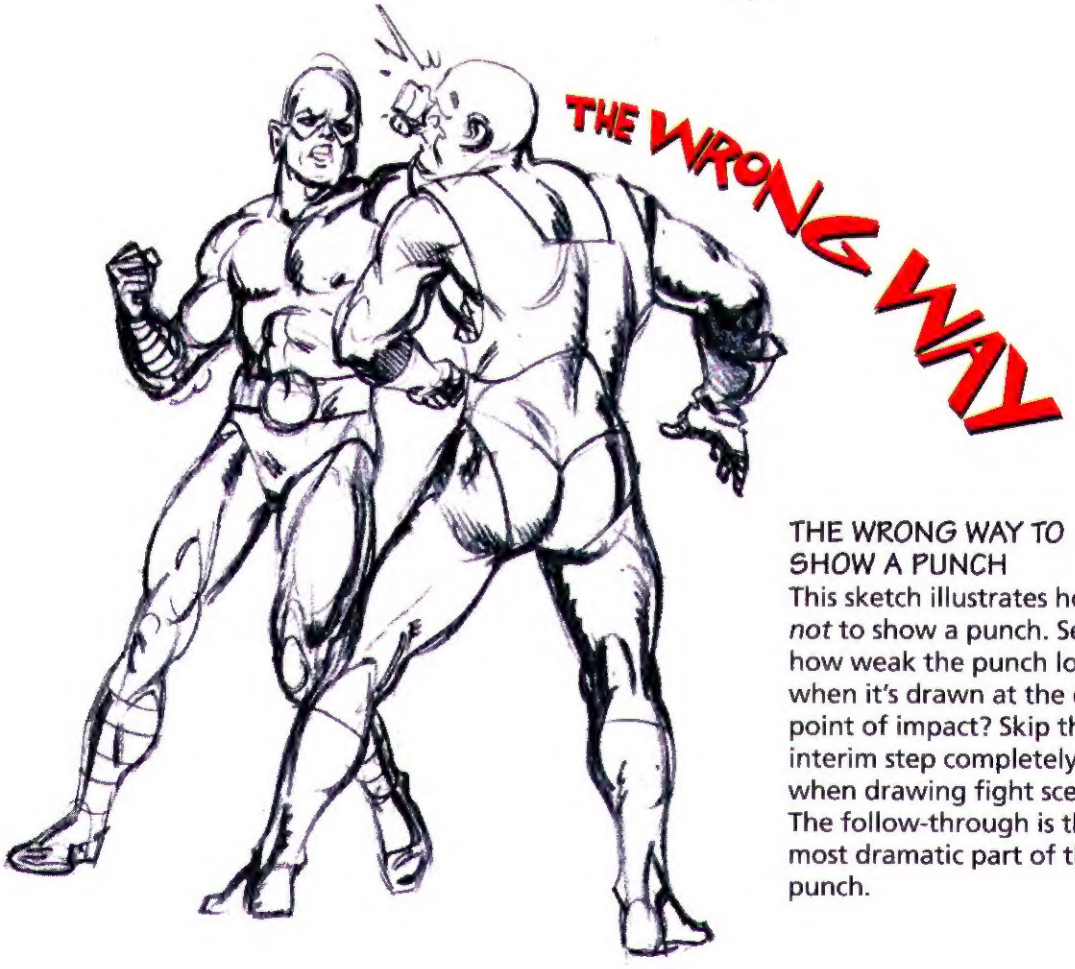
1. THE WINDUP
Imagine that the character's punching hand weighs 50 pounds. As the windup begins, the entire weight of the body is pulled toward the punching hand.

2. THE FOLLOW-THROUGH
The follow-through is indicated by the fully extended punching arm and its accompanying speed lines. Note also that the punch is shown *after* the point of impact. This is the key to a great punch.





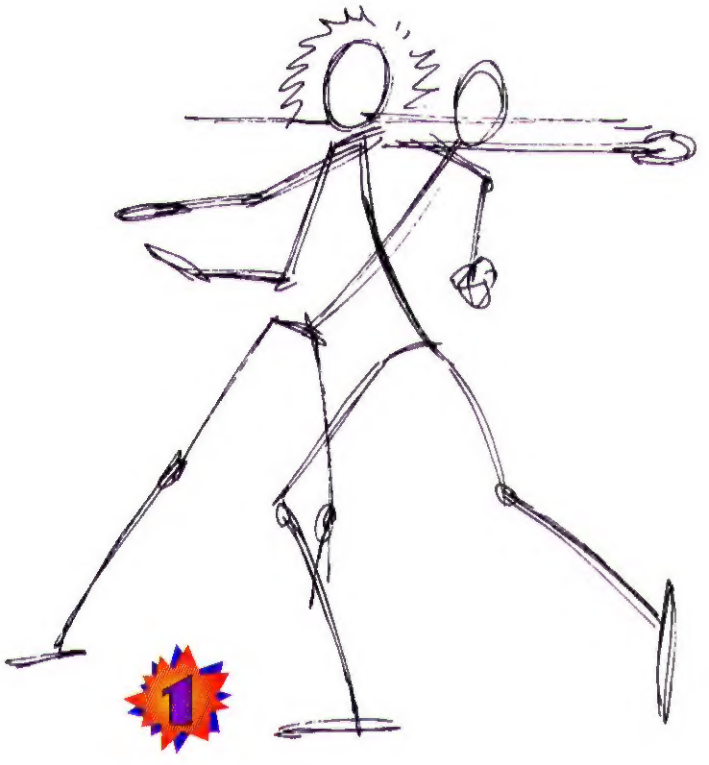
The point of impact is indicated solely by a starburst. As artist Frank Springer puts it, "The punch should *look* like it hurts!" Notice how the victim is hurled back by the force, his knees buckling and his head snapping back.

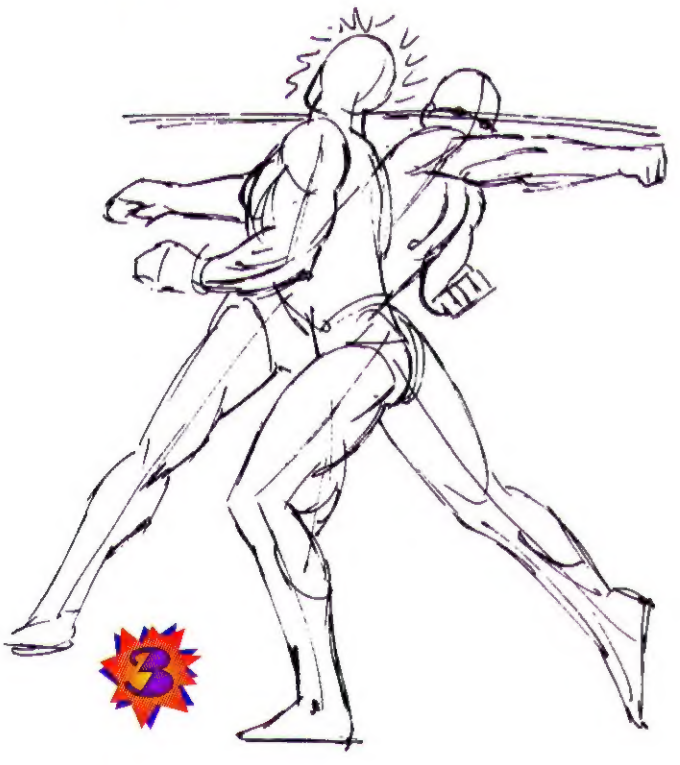


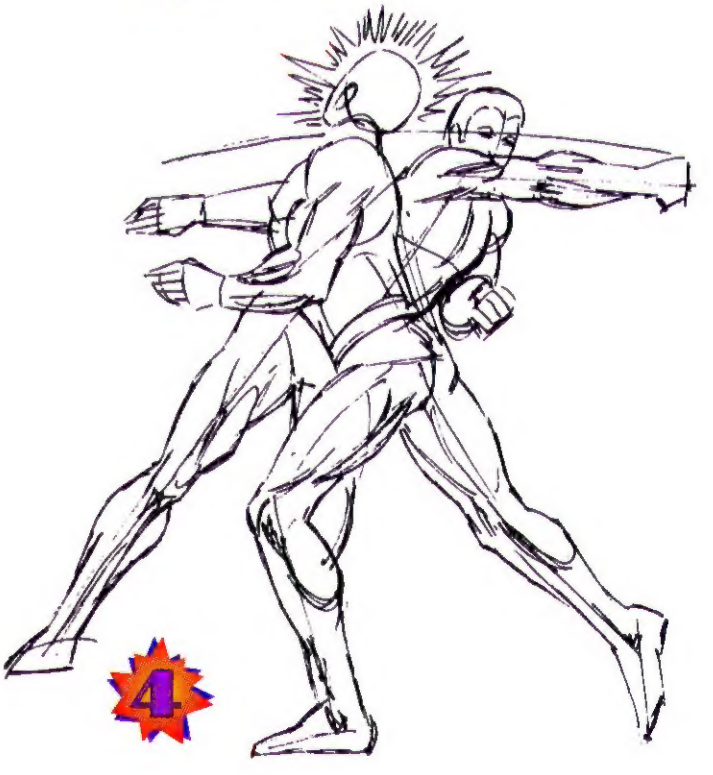
THE WRONG WAY TO SHOW A PUNCH
This sketch illustrates how *not* to show a punch. See how weak the punch looks when it's drawn at the exact point of impact? Skip this interim step completely when drawing fight scenes. The follow-through is the most dramatic part of the punch.

CLEAN PUNCHES

There are no small punches in a comic book fight. Every punch is a haymaker. Because fight scenes frequently show overlapping figures (as in this series of sketches), be sure to space the characters so that the reader can easily see the completed punch at full extension. Short uppercuts and hooks aren't dramatic.

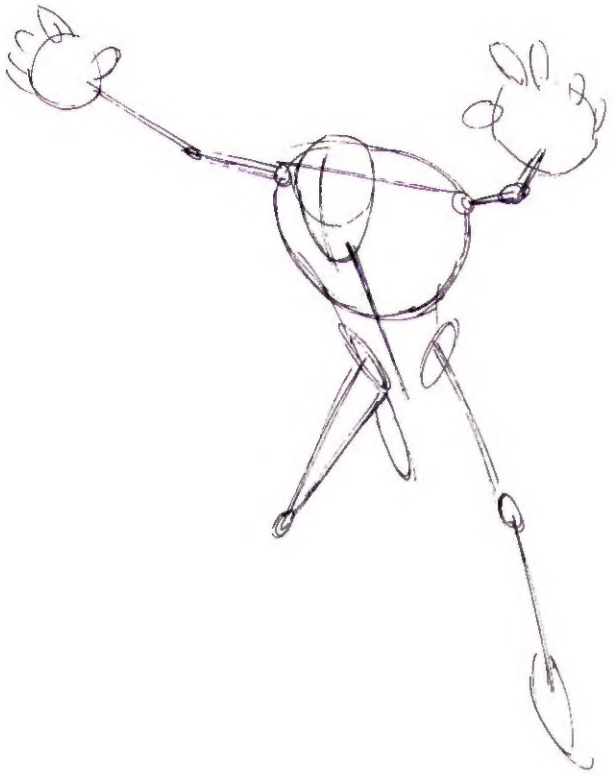


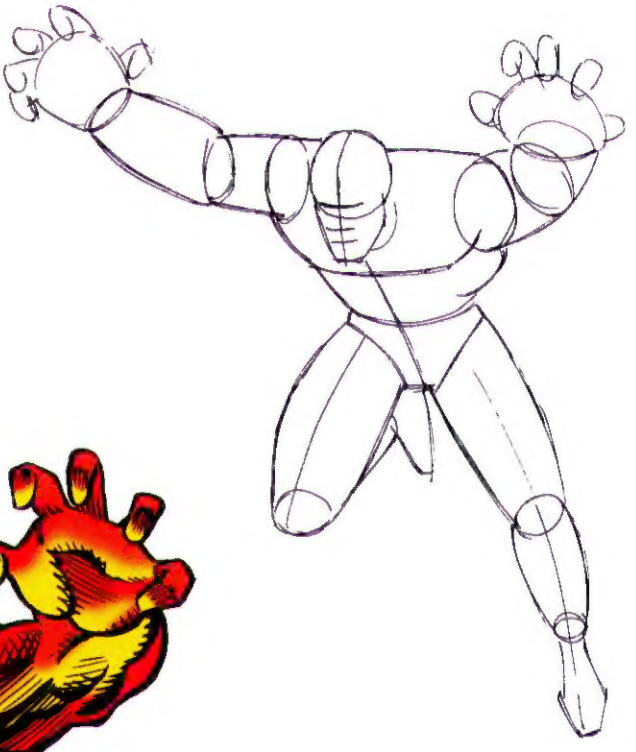




THE LUNGE ATTACK

We're all nice guys in this business, but sometimes we want our characters to go for the kill. Any lunge or attack movement needs to be swift, sudden, and totally forward-moving.



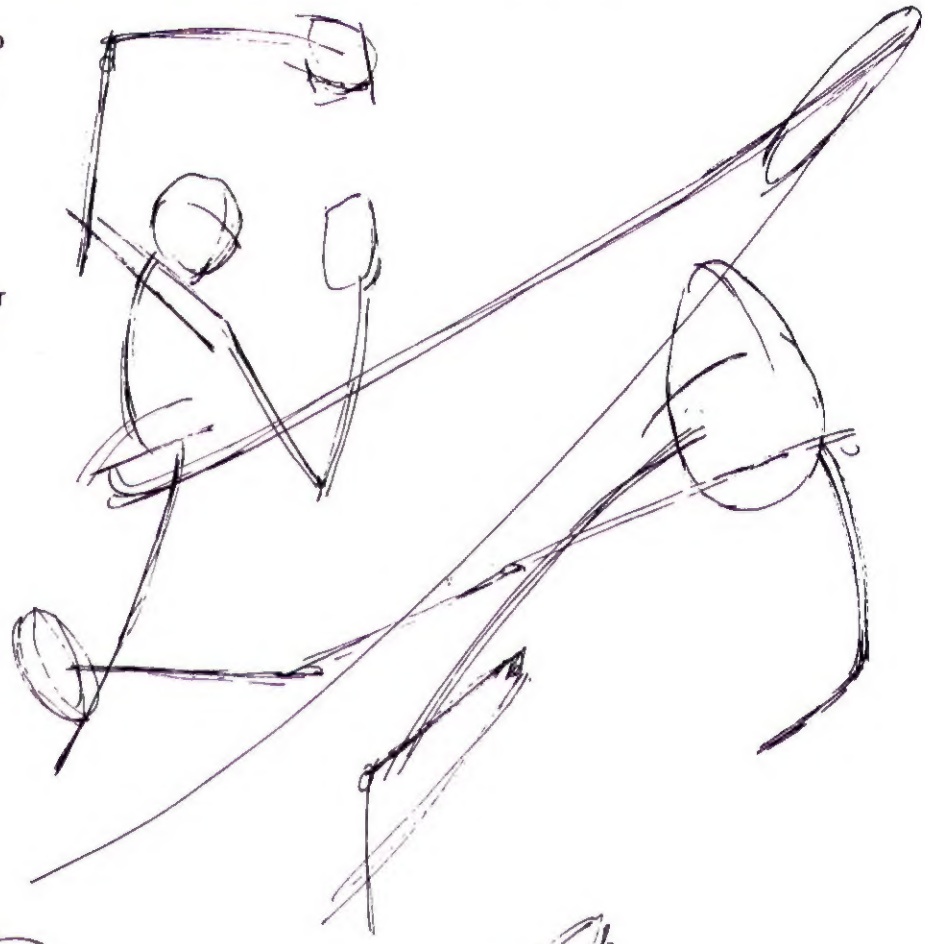


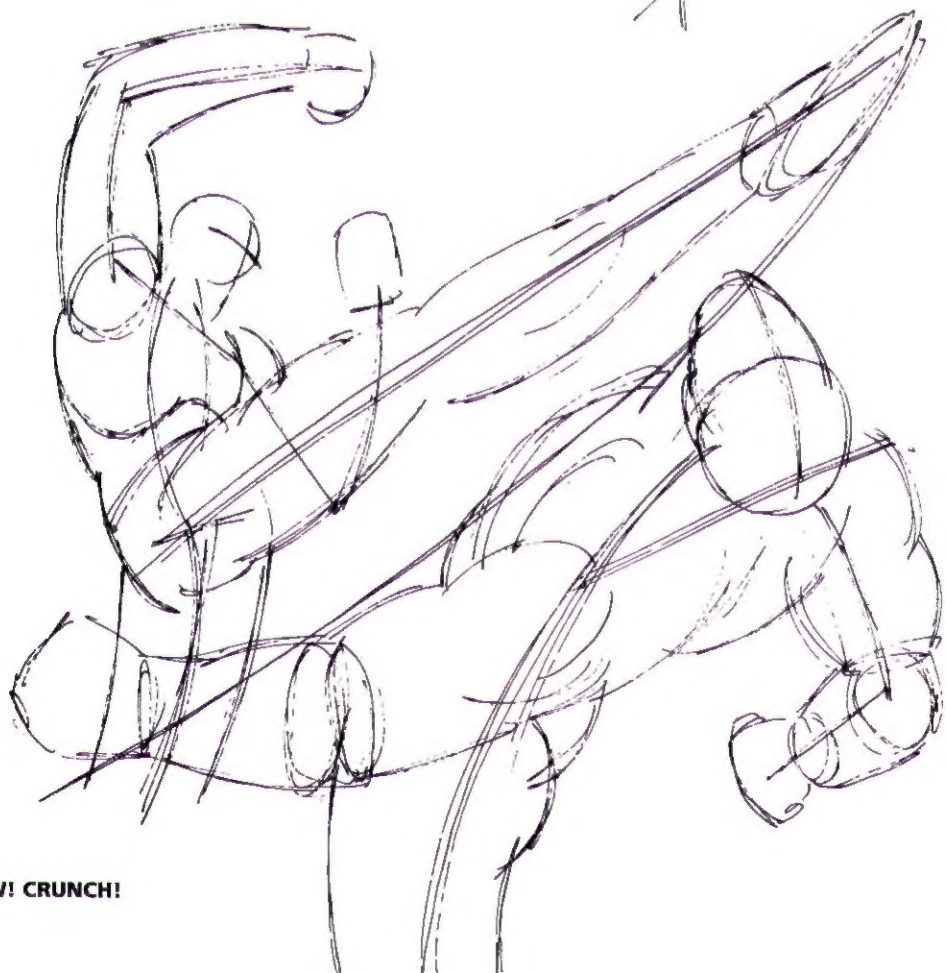
Notice that not all of this character's body is attacking at the same time. His hands are out in front, followed by his shoulders, then his torso, and finally by his launching foot. This creates the feeling of movement, like a lion pouncing. It is visually powerful. You can use this technique whether your character is lunging empty-handed, with his fist, or with a weapon.

Artist Frank McLaughlin draws some of the meanest-looking figures in the business. In fact, this is a picture of Frank himself before he's had his morning cup of coffee.

LEANING INTO THE PUNCH OR KICK

It may seem natural to lean back to throw a kick. But to do so means you're throwing your energy away from the target. Your character should lean *into* his punch or kick, thrusting all his weight forward. The character who lands the hard punch or kick has *both* his fists tightly clenched, while the character receiving the blow slackens his fists slightly, a sign of weakness.





You can demonstrate the impact on the opponent most clearly by drawing his chin up in the air, as if he'd gotten socked right there. This is a clear sign that the punch was effective.

THE JUDO SHOULDER THROW

Every comic book artist should know a few martial arts moves. It's a popular belief that a martial arts expert can take on many ordinary street fighters at one time. This makes for great drama, and also boosts enrollment in local karate studios.

The judo throw is a stunning way to end a battle by literally tossing an opponent into the air and onto his back. Let's break down the various moves:

1 *The Defender sidesteps the Attacker's punch while simultaneously grabbing his punching arm.*

2 *The Defender begins to turn forward, and as he does, gives a tug, causing the Attacker to lose his balance.*

3 *The Defender dips his shoulder, getting ready to position it under the Attacker's arm.*

4 *The Defender now shoves his shoulder under the Attacker's arm. Now it's bye-bye to the foolish Attacker, because at this point, it's all academic.*

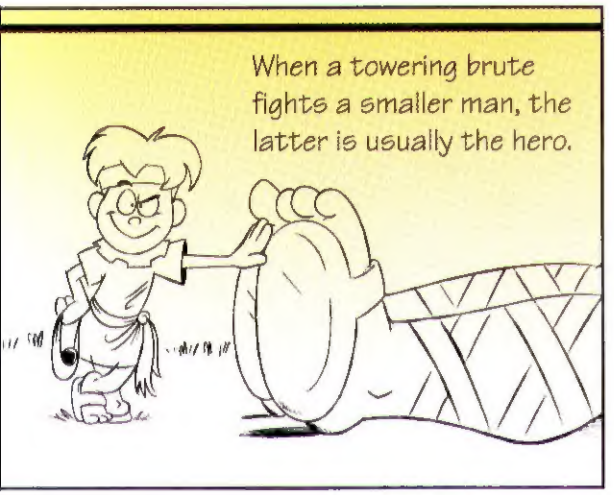
5 *The Defender pitches forward and the Attacker sails overhead...*

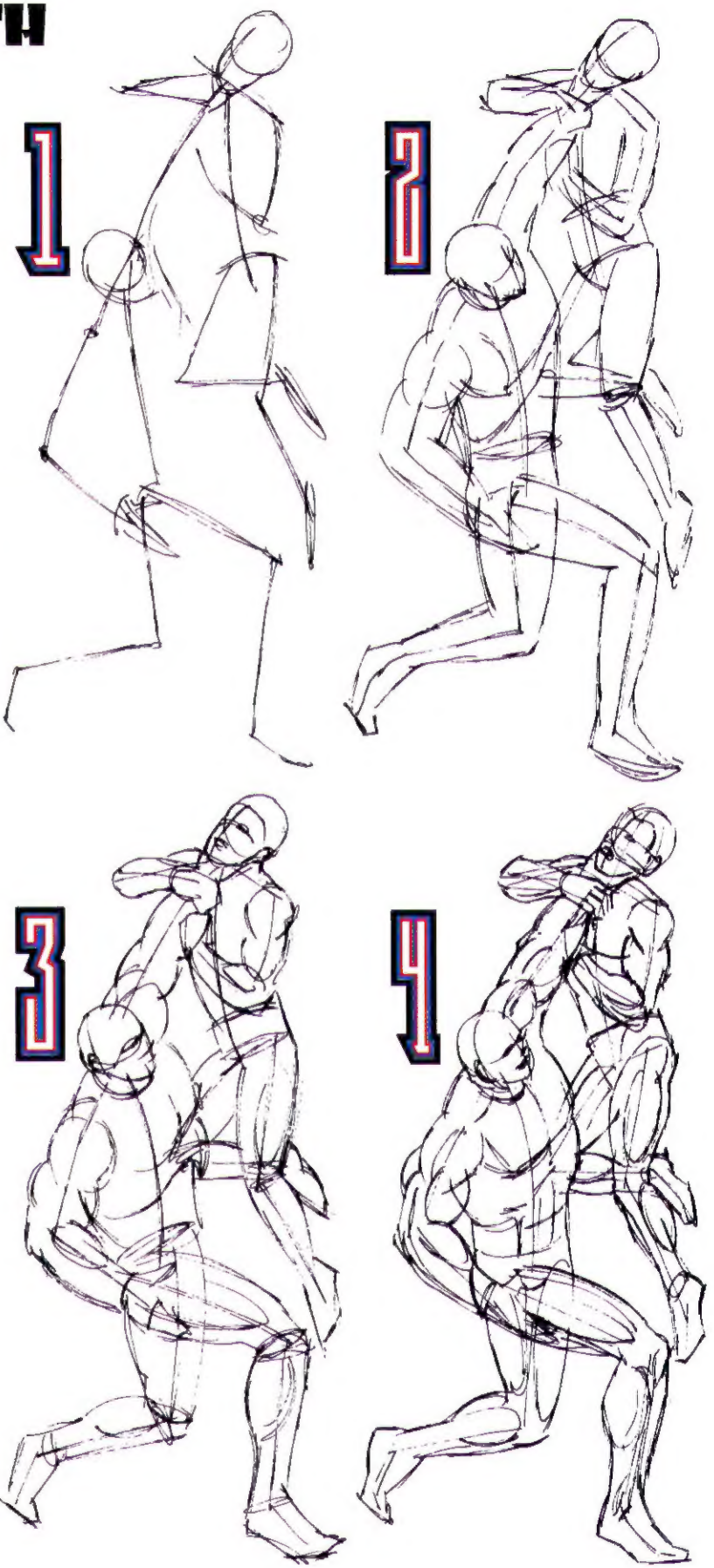
6 *...and just before the Attacker hits the ground, the Defender lets go, which causes the Attacker to hit the ground harder. Phew! Another dastardly villain has been disposed of.*

DAVID VS. GOLIATH

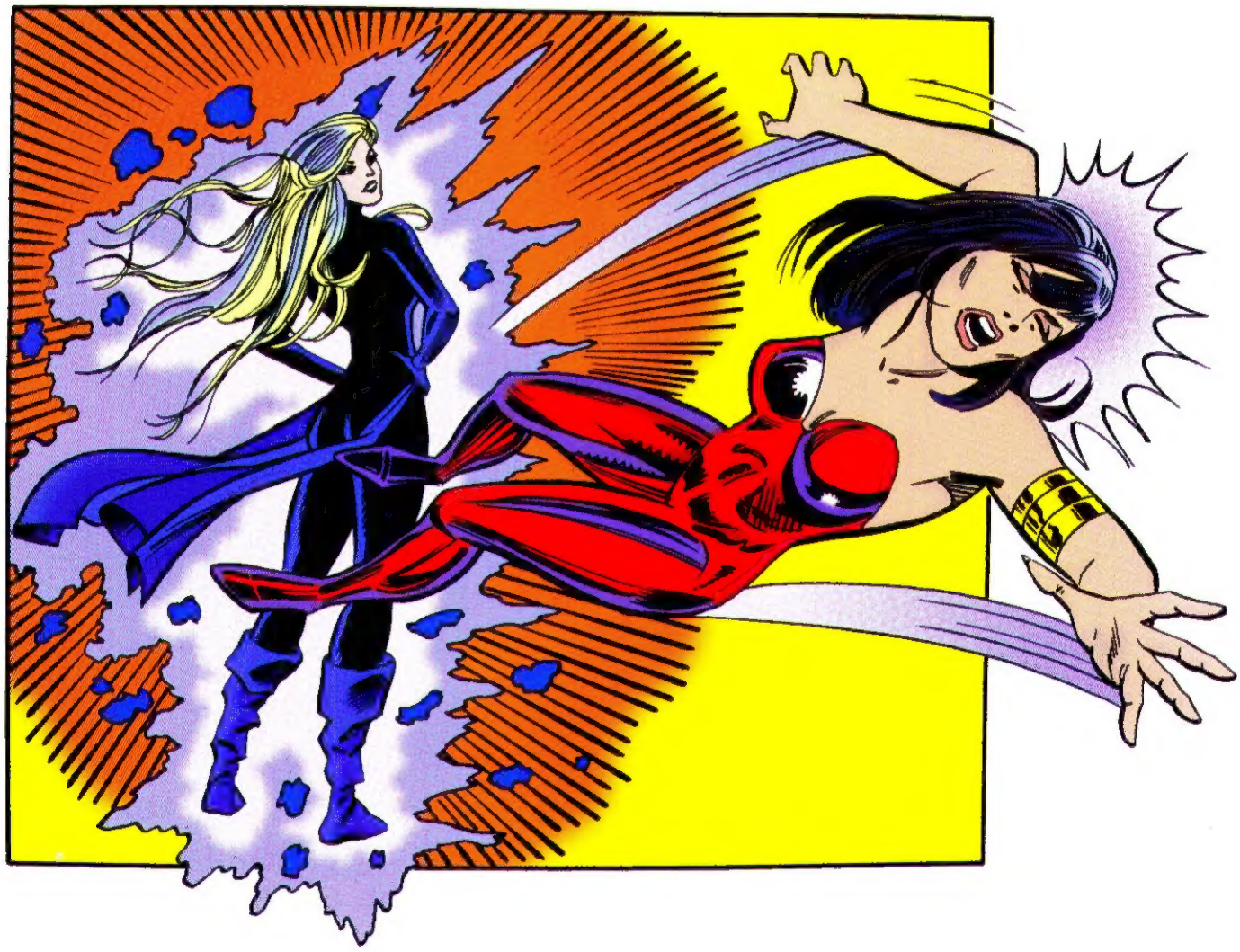
An unfair fight is a very dramatic device, and has been since time immemorial. Casting the hero as the underdog, who must win against insurmountable odds, makes us want to root for him, and if he starts the scene by ostensibly fighting a losing battle, only to come from behind to win through sheer heart, the fight will be truly exciting.

Make sure the giant nemesis uses his physical advantages of strength and size in the fight scene.





THE BALANCE OF POWER

You don't always have to throw a punch to win a fight—provided you're a comic book character. Super powers, such as body force fields, can repel an attack, hurling someone even farther than the most powerful punch.

The most important thing to remember when designing super powers for your characters is this: A character should also have a weakness. Why is that so important? Think about it. If your character is so strong that he or she can't possibly be beaten, then why watch the fight? Even Superman needed Kryptonite to heighten the suspense. The weakness doesn't have to be physical—your character could have a thing for a "bad girl." Design a weakness that's as original as the special powers you've invented.